

**Meeting Minutes**

**Board of County Commissioners  
Hyde County**

**Special Meeting – EMS Review Committee**

**August 2, 2010**

Vice-Chairman Sharon Spencer called the Special Meeting of the Hyde County Board of Commissioners to order at 5:00 PM on Monday, August 2, 2010 in the Hyde County Government Center, Multi-Use Room, and the Ocracoke School Commons area using electronic conferencing equipment. The following members were present on the mainland: Commissioners Sharon Spencer, Anson Byrd, and Ken Collier; County Attorney Sid Hassell; Interim County Manager/Clerk to the Board David Smitherman; Deputy Clerk to the Board Justin Gibbs; and members of the public. The following members were present on Ocracoke: Commissioner Darlene Styron; Deputy Clerk to the Board Jamie Tunnell; and members of the public.

Commissioner Spencer called the Special Meeting of the Hyde County Board of Commissioners to order at 5:00 PM on August 2, 2010.

Mark O'Mara, Emergency Services Director, stated that before July 1, 2009 the EMS crews responded from their homes and that the crews worked seven days on-call and had seven days off-duty with no overtime. He said that the mainland and Ocracoke operated on two different systems, on Ocracoke the Ocracoke Health Center operated a paramedic level service and that mainland Hyde County operated an intermediate level service. Mr. O'Mara stated that there was no effort to create new paramedic level positions and that the paramedic level service on Ocracoke relied heavily on part-time paramedics. Mr. O'Mara stated that during this period there were management changes and that there was a shortage of part-time paramedics to work. Mr. O'Mara informed the Board that due to the shortage of part-time paramedics, some of the paramedics on staff were forced to work 10-15 days in a row and this resulted in the implementation of a new pay schedule which included overtime and on-call time.

The Interim County Manager, David Smitherman, reported that the Finance Office and the Emergency Services Director worked to prepare several graphs and charts detailing over-time payments. Mr. Smitherman asked the Board to review a graph detailing the three employees that earned the most overtime on any given month, but he stated that the employees were not necessarily the same every month. The Interim County Manager informed the Board that the Finance Office referenced the pay records for August 2009 when they created the graph and that the referenced records were attached to the graph. Mr. Smitherman further stated that there were a lot of transitions during this time period, including a change in management, a new pay schedule was implemented which included new pay categories, the paramedic level service became effective on the mainland, and the availability of part-time paramedics decreased. The Interim County Manager asked



Corrine Gibbs, the Human Resources Officer, to explain the struggles faced by the EMS Department during this transitional period. Ms. Gibbs stated that in August 2009 the over-time received increased dramatically due to the difficulties encountered by the EMS Department regarding the acquisition of part-time paramedics. The Human Resources Officer informed the Board that in order to obtain and retain part-time paramedics; the EMS Department had to promise the candidates a certain number of working days. Ms. Gibbs stated that due to these difficulties the graph depicts an increase in over-time, because some employees worked six to seven 24 hour shifts in a row. Ms. Gibbs further stated that these increased overtime hours were required in order to retain the part-time paramedics.

Mr. Smitherman asked the Board to look at the first employee listed on the graph, which corresponded to the blue line on the graph. On the first day listed on the graph, which was July 16, 2009, the employee came in at 8AM and left at 8AM the next day. Then on the next line, the employee started at 4PM on July 20, 2009 and did not leave until 8AM on July 25, 2009. The Interim County Manager stated that just by looking at the graphs it is very easy to see how the overtime hours accumulated by the EMS Department added up quickly; the Interim Manager further stated that at the bottom of the graph the employees were paid 220 hours of regular pay and 426 hours of over-time during the month of August 2009. Mr. Smitherman asked the Commissioners to review the documents before them and during that review he passed out another document that outlined the total payroll for FY2009-2010.

Commissioner Spencer asked if the blue line on the graph represented regular pay. The Human Resources Officer replied that only over-time hours were reflected on the graph. Commissioner Spencer stated that during the month of August 2009 the three referenced employees made over sixteen thousand dollars in overtime. The Interim County Manager confirmed Commissioner Spencer's statement.

Commissioner Styron asked why there was no total for the green line on the graph. Ms. Gibbs stated that the figure was left off mistakenly, but that the total could be calculated from the attached check requests and that she could obtain this figure for the Board. Mr. Smitherman stated that the difficulty with the employee illustrated by the green line on the graph stemmed from the fact that this employee turned in three months of pay all at once; therefore three months of pay were reflected on the books during the month of August 2009. The Interim County Manager said that this situation very accurately reflected the management failures that were being experienced during this period of time. Commissioner Styron asked if they were supposed to be paid monthly. Mr. Smitherman replied that the EMS Department employees are paid monthly and that the only answer as to why this employee was allowed to go three months without turning in timesheets is poor management. The Interim County Manager said that the department head should have insured that the timesheets were completed on a monthly basis. Commissioner Styron asked who was responsible for turning in the timesheets. The Human Resources Officer replied that the employee should turn the timesheet into the supervisor and that the supervisor is responsible for turning the timesheet into the Finance Office. Commissioner Styron asked if the timesheets in this particular instance were turned in



and nothing was done with them or if the three month delay was the result of the employee holding the timesheets. The Human Resources Officer replied that mostly likely the employee held the timesheets because the part-time paramedics only work certain days and then they return to their homes and it is most likely that the employee did not turn the timesheets in before departing. Commissioner Styron asked what the protocol stated as far as the turning in of timesheets. Ms. Gibbs stated that all timesheets are due by a specific date, which is assigned by the department head, and then check requests are attached to the timesheets by the department head and they are submitted to the Finance Office to be processed. The Interim County Manager asked if situations like this were still occurring. The Human Resources Officer stated that they had not received any more timesheets late, because one month the Finance Office did not pay employees that turned in their timesheets late. Ms. Gibbs further stated that if an employee turns in a timesheet three months late that she is required by law to pay the employee no matter how late the timesheet is submitted, but the employee will not be paid until the regular payroll period.

The Interim County Manager asked the Board to review the handout regarding the total payroll for FY2009-2010, Mr. Smitherman reported that the County paid a little over one million dollars in payroll during the referenced fiscal year. Commissioner Collier asked if the County was recouping any of the money from the EMS Billing Program. The Emergency Service Director stated that some of the money was being collected and since January 2010 they had collected approximately \$230,000.00. Mr. Smitherman asked the Finance Officer what the budgeted revenue was for this fiscal year. The Finance Officer stated that they were budgeting to recoup approximate one-third of the expenditure this fiscal year. Commissioner Styron asked if the funds collected would go to the general fund. The Interim County Manager confirmed that the funds collected would be contributed to the general fund.

Commissioner Collier asked if anyone had checked into the possibility of implementing a transport service for the nursing home and medical center. Mr. O'Mara stated that he was in the process of researching the possibility of starting a transport service, but right now he did not consider it to be feasible.

Mr. Smitherman stated that the document before the Board broke down the payroll by month for part-time, full-time, and overtime expenditures. Commissioner Spencer asked if \$200,000.00 was the total amount collected for FY2009-2010. The Finance Officer stated that they collected a total of \$400,000.00 for FY2009-2010. Commissioner Collier asked if the County was billing for every EMS call. Mr. O'Mara stated that they were billing for every call. Commissioner Collier asked how much the County could expect to receive on a per call basis. The Emergency Services Director stated that the average bill was approximately \$750.00 per trip and \$10.50 per mile. Mr. Smitherman asked if the rate were set by the Federal Government. Mr. O'Mara replied that the rates were set by the Hyde County Commissioners and that the current rates had been in effect since he became Emergency Services Director. Commissioner Spencer asked if the County can receive reimbursement for paramedic level care if it is determined that paramedic level service is not needed during a call. Mr. O'Mara stated that he could not answer that



question because the set rate that Medicare/Medicaid reimburses is base on the County's rate. Commissioner Spencer stated that she posed the question because she was under the impression that they reimbursed based on the level of care that was being provided and she wanted to be sure that the County was receiving the proper reimbursement.

Commissioner Byrd stated that one of the reasons the Commissioners approved the implementation of a paramedic service on the mainland, was due to the fact that they were told the County would be able to bill at a higher rate if they were providing paramedic level services. Commissioner Byrd asked the Emergency Services Director what the rate difference was between intermediate care and paramedic care, because they were told that the rate was tremendously higher for paramedic level services. Mr. O'Mara stated that he had tried to receive an answer to that question on several occasions, but was never able to ascertain the difference in rate between the levels of care. Commissioner Spencer asked if the Emergency Services Director could look at calls where paramedic level services were required and where they were not required. Mr. O'Mara stated that he had done that, but there was no difference in the rate at which the County was reimbursed.

Commissioner Collier asked how many paramedics and EMTs the EMS Department currently had on staff. The Emergency Services Director replied that there were five full-time paramedics on staff on the mainland and 4 EMT-Basics. Brain Carter, Ocracoke EMS Lead Paramedic, stated that there were 2 paramedics, 1 EMT-Intermediate, and 3 EMT-Basics that worked on Ocracoke Island.

Commissioner Byrd asked why the over-time pay was growing after the Commissioners approved more paramedic level positions, because when the positions were requested it was stated that the increased positions would cut down on the overtime pay. Commissioner Byrd stated that the overtime pay had increased from sixteen thousand dollars to twenty-five thousand dollars per month. Mr. O'Mara replied that the overtime increase could be attributed to the addition of another staffed ambulance on Ocracoke, which was added to compensate for the increased number visitors to Ocracoke Island during the summer months.

Commissioner Collier asked what the minimum pay scale was for full-time paramedics and EMTs. The Human Resources Officer replied that EMT-Basics start at a pay grade 61 which is \$25,546.00, an EMT-Intermediate starts at a pay grade 63 which is \$27,792.00, and a EMT-Paramedic starts at a pay grade 65 which is \$30,234.00.

Mr. Smitherman informed the Board that the Emergency Services Director had more of his presentation to give, but that the Commissioners could ask further question after the presentation was complete. Mr. O'Mara stated that after July 1, 2009 the EMS crews on the mainland responded from the Mattamuskeet Base on Juniper Bay Road and the EMS crews on Ocracoke responded from their base on Back Road. Mr. O'Mara reported that the EMS call procedures for the mainland state that the first responders are dispatched, and then the Paramedic Quick Response Vehicle (QRV) is dispatched, and finally the EMT-I Ambulance is dispatched. The Emergency Services Director further stated that he



was working with the fire departments to change the response protocols for the first responders. Mr. O'Mara informed the Board that the Paramedic QRV transports the paramedic and their equipment to the call and once on scene the paramedic evaluates whether paramedic level services are needed, if not then the paramedic returns to the Mattamuskeet Base. The Emergency Services Director said that it takes about forty-three dollars per call to run the Paramedic QRV and two hundred and sixty-one dollars per call to run the EMT-I Ambulance. Mr. O'Mara stated that there are 7 ambulances, 2 trucks, and 1 SUV within the EMS Department's fleet of vehicles and that he did not think that 7 ambulances were required; therefore he felt that one of the ambulances could be placed in surplus and sold. The Emergency Services Director said that the QRV and truck on Ocracoke are extremely useful, because the QRV gives the paramedic access to patients located in areas that cannot be reached by the ambulance and the truck on Ocracoke is used to help remove patients from the beach.

The Emergency Services Director informed the Commissioners that Hyde County EMS uses a 24/72 schedule for the EMTs and the EMT-Is; they work 24 hours on and 72 hours off, with one day on call. The paramedics are scheduled three days in a row and Mr. O'Mara said that they try to split the days between two pay periods to reduce the number of overtime hours accrued. Mr. O'Mara asked the Board to review the sample schedules attached and Mr. Smitherman stated that he asked Mr. O'Mara to include the sample schedules to show the Commissioners how EMS operations had been managed within the past few months. Commissioner Spencer asked if the closest paramedics were called in the event that unforeseen staffing needs arose. Mr. O'Mara replied that he was unsure, but that they tried to utilize the closest available staff. The Interim County Manager asked Mr. O'Mara how they were advertising the part-time positions that were available. Mr. O'Mara replied that they advertised the positions on the County's website, as well as the NCOEMS website. Mr. O'Mara reported that he had received a number of applications from people nearby, but they had been rejected to bad references or there was something wrong with the application submitted. Commissioner Byrd asked if they had advertised in the local newspapers. The Emergency Services Director replied that the positions had been advertised in the Coastland Times. Commissioner Styron asked what the starting pay rate would be for a part-time paramedic. Mr. O'Mara replied that the pay rate was \$12.50 per hour. Commissioner Styron asked if this rate could be causing the decreased interest in these positions. Mr. O'Mara said that the low pay rate could very well contribute to the lack of interest in these positions. Commissioner Styron stated that the County could save money by increasing the part-time hourly rate, because hiring part-time staff could decrease the overtime. Commissioner Collier reported to the Board that he had spoken with the Fire Chief and EMS Director in Washington, NC and they informed him that the city had two EMS stations and had an operating budget of \$622,000.00, but they only offered intermediate level service. Commissioner Collier stated that he did not understand why paramedic level service was costing the County so much, with the exception of the overtime being accrued, and that he felt the County could not afford to continue the service if the budget continued to increase. Commissioner Collier also informed the Board that he heard that Pitt County had ten stations with an operating budget of approximately \$3,000,000.00 and paramedic level service. Commissioner Styron replied that Pitt County had two county stations and eight



contracted stations with an operating budget of \$400,000 per station. David Daye, Hyde County Paramedic, asked the Commissioners if the figure that they had obtained from Pitt County included salaries, because he had completed a study three years ago and Pitt County reported that they had a budget \$3,800,00.00 without salaries. Commissioner Styron stated that she was under the impression that salaries were included, but that she could double check the figure with Pitt County. The Interim County Manager stated that larger counties have the ability to relocate resources in the event that a call is taking longer than expected, therefore they do not have to call in additional staff to meet the staffing short falls and unfortunately Hyde County does not have the ability to do that because of the geography of the County. Mr. Smitherman stated that this relocation of resources allows the larger counties to save money and the inability to do that is something that is peculiar to Hyde County. Commissioner Byrd referenced the fact that one employee's regular salary was \$600.00 and the employee's overtime pay was \$2,838.00, Commissioner Byrd stated that the overtime pay was a serious problem as far as he was concerned. Mr. Smitherman stated that the Emergency Services Director had some options to present in his presentation that would satisfy the problem referenced by Commissioner Byrd.

The Emergency Services Director said that they currently have 5 full-time paramedics, 3 on the mainland and 2 on the island. He also stated that part-time employees are used to fill the shift needs and when part-time employees are not available then full-time employees are used to fill the needs. Mr. O'Mara informed the Commissioners that on-call staff members respond to the station to await a second call if the first ambulance responds to call and that the on-call personnel remain at the station until the first ambulance returns. The Emergency Services Director said that they were changing the paramedic schedules to a 48/96 schedule, meaning 48 hours on and 96 hours off, with one scheduled day off. Mr. O'Mara stated that this would further reduce the overtime accrued by the paramedics. The Emergency Services Director said that another cost saving plan consisted of training the EMTs and EMT-Is to the paramedic level, this would allow for a paramedic to be place on every shift. Mr. O'Mara further stated that this would allow for a paramedic to be on the ambulance and would eliminate the need for the QRV. Mr. O'Mara informed the Commissioners that he had been working with Beaufort County Community College to institute a paramedic training course and that it would take 12 to 14 months to train all of County's EMTs and EMT-Is to the paramedic level. In the next year, Mr. O'Mara stated that he wanted to change the schedule for paramedics, train the dispatchers to the Emergency Medical Dispatcher level, train all EMTs and EMT-Is to the paramedic level, re-write the first responder dispatch protocols, place a second staffed ambulance at the Mattamuskeet Base, and buy a new ambulance for the mainland to replace one of the current ambulances. Mr. O'Mara reported that even though the County does not have the staff to operate all of the ambulances in the fleet, that there are spare ambulances just in case one should happen to breakdown. Mr. O'Mara informed the Commissioners that within the next five years he hoped to build a second station and put a paramedic QRV in the Ponzer area.

Mr. O'Mara presented the Commissioners with several options to cut costs relating to EMS operations and they are as follows:



### **OPTION A**

- New scheduling plan
- Train EMTs and EMT-Is to the paramedic level
- Eliminate the QRV
- Eliminate on-call time

Mr. O'Mara stated that this option would reduce overtime, ensure a paramedic on each ambulance, eliminate the QRV, and eliminate the need for on-call time.

### **OPTION B**

- New scheduling plan
- Eliminate the Paramedic Program

The Emergency Services Director said that this option was regressive and would require the EMS Plan to be re-written. Mr. O'Mara said that he was unsure how NCOEMS would view this option and that he did not know what the process would involve regarding the regression of the EMS program.

### **OPTION C**

- Contract EMS to a private contractor

Commissioner Spencer asked Mr. O'Mara if he had done any cost comparisons in relation to the current system. The Emergency Services Director replied that he had not done any cost comparisons, but that he could prepare these comparisons for the Board given more time. Commissioner Styron asked how option A would save the County money because the County would still require part-time staff. The Emergency Services Director replied that training the current EMTs and EMT-Is to the paramedic level would eliminate the need for part-time staffing with the exception of have to fill in for requested sick leave and vacation leave. Commissioner Byrd asked how many full-time personnel were required to do away with overtime and part-time completely. Mr. O'Mara replied that overtime would never be eliminated completely due to the 24/72 schedule, because they would work an additional 8 hours over two weeks out of the month and one week they would only work 24 hours. Commissioner Byrd asked Mr. O'Mara if he felt that the staff was efficient working 24 hours in a row. Mr. O'Mara replied that if the County had a higher call volume then he would begin to question the efficiency, but since the call volume is so low he felt that efficiency was not an issue. Commissioner Collier requested that Mr. O'Mara complete a cost comparison between a schedule consisting of all paramedic level personnel and a schedule consisting of all EMT-B and EMT-I level staff. Commissioner Styron asked if any pay projections had been completed regarding the change in schedule. The Emergency Services Director replied that no projections had been complete, but that he could obtain those figures for the Board. Commissioner Byrd



said he felt the Commissioners need a spreadsheet detailing the three options presented and what each would cost. Commissioner Byrd stated that he felt that he could not make a decision between the options based on the information that was presented. The Interim County Manager asked the Board if a decision on the future of the EMS program was a cost based decision exclusively. Commissioner Byrd replied that he did not feel he would be able to make a decision without knowing the costs involved. Commissioner Spencer stated that she did not feel that the overtime being accrued is conducive with providing the best services that can be provided to the citizens of Hyde County. Commissioner Byrd said that he thinks that the overtime issue speaks to a larger problem and that is poor management. Commissioner Byrd further stated that he had also spoken with an individual about their EMS system that covered a much broader area in population and geography and they informed him that they had a volunteer program with 29 members with a budget of \$29,000.00. Commissioner Byrd said that the Commissioners are charged with justifying the expenditures that they approve and that the service needs to meet the expectations that go along with the amount of money being expended to provide that service and he does not feel that is happening in the case of EMS. Commissioner Collier stated that the Board had to layoff nine employees after approving a budget increase of \$365,000.00 for the EMS program in April and he felt that they probably would not have had to layoff those employees otherwise. Commissioner Collier further stated that the Board was not trying to do away with the EMS program, but cost cutting measures need to be taken regarding the overtime. Commissioner Spencer said that she knew some of the paramedics were from Davie County and asked Mr. O'Mara if they provided paramedic level service and what their budget was. Mr. O'Mara replied that Davie County did provide paramedic level service, but he did not know what their budget was. The Emergency Services Director stated that he could obtain the budget figure from Davie County.

Commissioner Styron asked if the Board could schedule another meeting to receive and discuss the figures that the Emergency Services Director was asked to prepare. The Interim County Manager said that the Commissioners could recess the meeting to a time and a place specific, but before the Board adjourned he wanted to recant the Board's requests. Mr. Smitherman stated that the Board requested the following, that research be done to determine if the reimbursements rates from Medicaid/Medicare were determined by the level of care provided or the level of the response, to determine what the rate of reimbursement is for an EMT versus a paramedic, to produce a total annual cost for each of the options presented by the Emergency Services Director, to see if there are any additional revenue sources such as transport services, and to obtain the figures from Davie County regarding their budget for EMS.

Commissioner Styron asked if there were any grant programs to help obtain ambulances. Mr. O'Mara replied that there are not many grant programs for paid EMS programs, but Mr. O'Mara stated that he was going to apply for a grant to help pay for the monitors to go on the ambulances.

Commissioner Spencer asked the Emergency Services Director to prepare a document showing the number of calls that required paramedic level service to be provided.



With no further questions or discussion, Commissioner Byrd made a motion to recess the special meeting until Tuesday, September 7, 2010 at 5:00 PM, contingent on the Emergency Services Director having all requested items prepared for the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Styron seconded the motion, the motion passed by the following vote:

Ayes-Commissioners Spencer, Byrd, Collier, and Styron

Nays – None

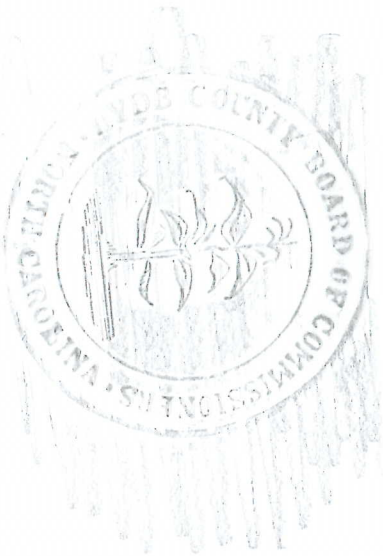
Absent- Commissioner Davis

The August 2, 2010 Special Meeting of the Hyde County Board of Commissioners recessed at 6:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Minutes approved on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of September, 2010.

  
Justin L. Gibbs, Deputy Clerk – Hyde County Board of Commissioners



  
Tom Davis, Chairman – Hyde County Board of Commissioners